

**W**HEN THINKING ABOUT THE NEED FOR CHILD CARE, ATTENTION IS USUALLY FOCUSED ON THE NEEDS OF PRESCHOOL AGE CHILDREN. Once children start elementary school, the assumption is that child care is no longer an issue and a working parent's worries are over. However, since school day and school year schedules bear little relation to typical work schedules, parents are faced with a new set of problems.

Most parents feel that elementary school children are too young to stay alone on a regular basis. In addition, there is growing concern about supervision and activities for middle school or junior high students. Many parents worry that their young adolescents may be vulnerable to experimentation with drugs, alcohol, smoking, or sexual activity if they are unsupervised or uninvolved in healthy and age-appropriate activities that make the most of out of school time.

As the business community begins to recognize that most families in Utah have both parents in the workforce, employers and community leaders have begun to see the need for child care and supervision extending up to the early teenage years.

There are a number of factors that influence the growing demand for school age child care:

- Even mothers who stayed home when their children were younger often go back to work when the children enter elementary school.
- Informal neighborhood or extended family supervision for children after school and during school vacations or intercession is less available than it was a generation ago.
- Concerns about the safety of unsupervised children has increased in all communities and all parts of the state.
- School over-crowding has led to year-round schooling with intercession breaks that play havoc with parents' work schedules.
- Holidays, mid-year school vacation weeks, teacher professional days, and the weeks before and after summer programs can account for up to eight weeks a year when children are out of school while parents need to be at work.
- Parents, educators and business leaders are also concerned about children's educational attainment and productive use of out of school time.

## *Considerations in Developing School Age Child Care*

In developing child care programs for school age children, there are several challenges that differ from planning for younger children:

- For services during the school year, geography and employees' commuting patterns are a factor. Generally children attend school near home. Depending on your business location and the distances your employees travel to work, the area to be served may cover many miles, many communities, and many schools.
- The age range for school age child care can begin with kindergarten and extend through age 13 or 14. Therefore the type of program, the range of activities, and the experience of program staff should be appropriate for a very broad age range. In addition, academic expectations vary considerably and the program should balance time for homework with time for relaxation and recreation.
- Finding appropriate facilities for school age programs can be difficult. There may be a need for space during the early morning and afternoons most of the time, but during school vacation, intercession or summer, space is needed all day. Many programs attempt to solve this by having several sites or planning field trips or activities off site when space is not available.
- Finding qualified teaching staff can also be difficult. The part time and irregular schedule further complicates the already difficult recruitment issues of low pay and low status for a very responsible and demanding job working with children.

## *Business Community Investment in School Age Child Care*

Several years ago, John Hancock Financial Services in Boston, Massachusetts, launched a low-cost holiday and school vacation program for children of their employees. Since then, many companies have developed creative responses to employees' school age child care needs. These companies have recognized the valuable return on the investment. As one executive said referring to his company's school age program, "We get it back in spades. We have very little turnover, and I think the work environment here is the number one contributor to retention."

Because of the variables mentioned earlier, there are several ways that companies can respond; there is not one single successful model but rather a number of strategies that companies have developed for addressing the need for school age care. Employers across the country have begun to develop a range of programs to respond to the need:

**Most employers discover that any effort made to support their employees' dual roles as parents and workers is appreciated and results in higher productivity.**

## Flexible Work Arrangements

Parents of school age children benefit from some flexibility in their work schedule, especially during the first weeks of the school year as children adjust to new classrooms and teachers, during school vacations and intercession. Another flexibility option that parents appreciate is time off to attend school activities, teacher conferences, or to volunteer occasionally in their children's classroom.

Key Bank in Albany, New York, and Bruce Industries in Dayton, Nevada, offer employees the chance to take leave during the holidays and winter or spring breaks, and pro-rate employee paychecks during that period. UNUM in Portland, Maine, offers a flextime schedule that allows parents to start their workday early in order to "beat the school bus home" at the other end of the day.

## Information on Existing Programs

Procter & Gamble in Ohio developed a directory that listed school age programs and after school activities, and worked with community recreation agencies and youth organizations to stimulate the development of additional services.

Companies who offer resource and referral services to employees can work with the referral service to develop targeted resources for parents of school age children. Often these programs are harder to find than a traditional child care center.

## Investing in Community School Age Programs and Quality Improvement

IBM funds a Dependent Care Initiative that contributes funding to local school district's school age child care programs. Johnson Wax in Racine, Wisconsin, offers half day kindergarten with child care available the other half of the day at its on-site child care center. The Community Hospital in Monterey, California, developed a network of flexible family child care providers to offer before and after school care for hospital employees. In addition to recruiting the providers and helping them get started, the hospital supports them with a newsletter, resource library and toll-free hotline for questions.

The University of Michigan and a local senior center arranged "telephone check-in" partnerships between homebound senior citizens and children who return to an empty home after school.

In New Jersey and Georgia, AT&T has invested resources in training school age child care providers, and in offering training programs for children up through the age of thirteen. Two notable projects include "Adventures in Peace Making" and "Project Adventure" which are offered through statewide school age child care alliances in each state.

## School Holiday and Vacation Care Programs

An increasing number of companies offer school age child care programs during off track school holidays or vacations. These full day programs often include field trips, cultural events or sports activities for school age children. In these short term programs, the work site serves as a drop off and pick up point each day, which is particularly convenient for parents. The program can take place at the work site if suitable space is available or it can take place nearby. In many cases, children spend most of the day on field trips, although a quick visit to mom or dad at work is popular as well.

Some employers offer these programs free or charge a small fee. Pre-registration is required so that staffing and space can be arranged ahead of time.

## Summer Camp Programs

A summer camp program can be based at the worksite, or at a convenient YMCA, college, school or other community organization. Hours, activities and transportation can be geared to meet the needs of the workforce. As an alternative to developing a full-scale camp, employers can purchase slots at existing camps or offer a summer camp subsidy program to help employees meet the cost of camp care.

Vacation care or camp care can be developed by an individual employer or by a group of employers. They can be managed from within the organization or development and management of the program can be subcontracted to a community organization or existing child care agency with extra capacity. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, a collaborative made up of six companies provides a full summer camp program and mid-year vacation week care for school age children. Children accompany their parents to work and transportation is provided from each company to a private school rented for the summer for use by the camp. During mid-year school vacations, a program of full day activities is developed using local museums or recreation facilities. Again, children are transported to and from their parents' worksite as part of the program.

## Community and Business Collaborations

If companies want to address the school age care issue, an effective approach is to work collaboratively with other companies, community organizations, government and local school districts.

The Utah Partnership for Educational and Economic Development has been working since 1990 to strengthen the Utah economy through education, training and research. This collaborative effort by the business community, education and government agencies includes mentoring programs, tutoring, scholarships, internships, special awards, training and other programs. Programs are offered in more than 5300 schools around the state, serving children from elementary

through college age. While the focus of the Partnership has been on the school day and the academic calendar, its goals and programs could be expanded to serve children during their time out of school. Participants in the Partnership or other interested employers might want to work to expand the Partnership mission to a full day, full year vision of academic support and enrichment.

The Tonawanda Business Community Child Care Consortium in Tonawanda, New York, has developed several specialized child care programs to serve employees of the four participating companies. These programs include the "Just Like Home" extended hours care at a nearby child care center in the community, "Just for Kids" before and after school care at two local schools, and "Just in Case", an emergency back up referral service that helps employees find child care providers for emergency care.

The American Business Collaboration for Quality Dependent Care is a national network of more than 250 corporations established to build and expand child care services for their employees' children. One of the collaborative's top priorities is developing high quality school age programs.

As a single corporation AT&T has taken the lead in fostering community-wide collaborative efforts in communities where their employees live and work. The AT&T Family Care Development Fund provides funding for community based teams to address the needs of school age children. Two examples of AT&T funded projects are:

West Jordan, Utah, was identified through focus groups and surveys as the residence of the many AT&T employees and was a community with very few school age care programs. Teams of parents, child care providers school officials, community organizations, local police and the Utah Office of Child Care developed an action plan to address the needs of school age children in West Jordan.

St. Louis, Missouri, has received funding for two projects:

- A leadership forum to focus eight school districts to develop strategies for providing school age programs for their own districts,
- Training for AT&T parents and school age care providers at four sites on three topics: behavior management, communication and media literacy.

A description of planning a collaborative is in the technical assistance paper, *Creating A Collaborative Work-Family Program*. More detailed information on emergency back up child care and vacation care programs is in the technical assistance paper on *Short Term Programs*. Both are available online at [jobs.utah.gov](http://jobs.utah.gov).